

Retail Stories, Advice and a Chance Encounter With Amazon

As a successful independent retailer and the North American Retail Hardware Association's (NRHA) chairman of the board, Megan Menzer is a busy person. She values time with family, at church and helping other retailers through her work with NRHA.

Hardware Retailing sat down with Menzer to learn more about her, from funny retail stories to turning down an offer to work for Amazon founder, Jeff Bezos. Read this Q&A for a few highlights from Menzer. To learn Menzer's backstory, flip to Page 60 in the magazine to read the feature on her role with the association, her history and more.

Hardware Retailing (HR): What's the weirdest product you never thought you'd have success selling?

Megan Menzer (MM): The weirdest product we've done well with was lingerie! We have a gift store, so I'm always looking for unique and different products. Camouflage is huge in our area, and I found camouflage lingerie. I had a Valentine's Day window display. People were stopping traffic looking at it. The lingerie sold out.

HR: Is it true you almost worked for Amazon? How do you think retailers can compete with them now?

MM: In 1998, Amazon opened a distribution center in our area. I went through the whole interview process, and they called me into the office. They asked me if I was interested in being Jeff Bezos' personal assistant. At that time, being 21 and not really understanding the extent of an assistant, I told them no.

Nobody knew Amazon back then. But as a retailer going up against Amazon today, it's tough.

As retailers, we don't want to share what we do because we don't want to brag. But we need to start doing that. All the money spent in the community can't continue if customers shop online or with big boxes. It ends that support.

HR: What has it been like as a female leader in a male-dominated industry?

MM: I get asked that question a lot, and it's funny because I never thought of myself as a woman in a man's world until the first person who asked me that. My situation is a little different because my great-grandmother started our business. Our store has always had more women than men.

For women in the industry, I say don't be afraid, educate yourselves and know what you're talking about. You gain so much respect when you can join in on the conversation. Educate yourself and don't be afraid to ask questions. 

